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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by Equality Now, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

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Statement

In 1995, governments pledged in the Beijing Platform for Action to "revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex." In 2000, the Outcome Document of the Special Session of the General Assembly convened to review the Platform for Action established a target date of 2005 for revocation of discriminatory laws. Two years later many discriminatory laws remain in force.

In 1999 and 2004, Equality Now published a representative sampling of explicitly discriminatory laws in force. As of December 2006, 21 of the 53 countries highlighted have repealed or amended the laws described - Bahamas, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, France, Guatemala, India, Jordan, Kuwait, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Republic of Korea, Serbia, Switzerland, Tonga, Turkey, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Such reforms set the example for moving from words to action. However, the majority of laws highlighted remain in force. See Words and Deeds—Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing +10 Review Process (at www.equalitynow.org).

In 2005, the CSW adopted a resolution to consider the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women, sponsored by the governments of Rwanda and the Philippines and co-sponsored by 21 other countries. Such a Special Rapporteur could support and facilitate the elimination of legalized discrimination against women specified in the Beijing Platform for Action. A similar resolution was passed at the 50th session of the CSW sponsored by the governments of Rwanda and Slovenia, but this mechanism has yet to be created.

In his in-depth study on violence against women published in July 2006, the UN Secretary-General states that "[v]iolence against women is both a cause and a consequence of discrimination against women and of their inequality and subordination". The report confirms that States' obligations are concrete and clear and points out the limited implementation of these commitments. It states that "securing gender equality...must not be treated as [an] optional or marginal task" and concludes that "[a] stronger, more consistent and visible leadership role by intergovernmental bodies and the entities of the United Nations system is necessary". It calls explicitly for States to "[r]emove all laws that discriminate against women; review and revise all State policies and practices to ensure that they do not discriminate against women; and ensure that provisions of multiple legal systems...comply with international human rights standards, including the principle of non-discrimination."

Equality Now urges the CSW to show the leadership called for by the Secretary-General. Governments undertook in 1995 to eliminate discriminatory laws, and in 2000 set a target date of 2005 to fulfill this undertaking. Twelve years out and two years past the target date, women need to know that governments are taking their obligations seriously. On behalf of our coalition of international, regional, and national organizations in Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Peru, United Republic of Tanzania, and the United States of America, we urge you, following two years of discussion, to create a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women at this 51st session.